

What is claimed is:

1. A drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle, said axle assembly comprising:

a support beam member;

5 a differential assembly module secured to said support beam member;

a pair of axle shaft members outwardly extending from said differential assembly member; and

a cover member fastened to said support beam member to cover at least a portion said differential assembly module, said cover member having two coaxially spaced access

10 openings therein each provided with an adjustable sealing flange device provided to seal an interior cavity within said cover member between one of said access openings and corresponding one of said axle shaft members;

wherein said adjustable sealing flange device being positionally adjustable relative to said cover member.

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2. The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein each of said axle shaft members having a first central axis of rotation and said sealing flange device having a second central axis; and wherein said adjustable sealing flange device being positionally adjustable relative to said cover member to align said second central axis of said

20 sealing flange device to said first central axis of one of said axle shaft members.

3. The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein said cover member has a plurality of holes adjacent to each of said access openings, and said

sealing flange device includes a corresponding plurality of mounting holes, said drive axle assembly further includes a plurality of fasteners adapted to extend through said holes in said cover member and said mounting holes in said sealing flange device for fastening said sealing flange device to said cover member.

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4. The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 3, wherein said mounting holes in said sealing flange device are substantially larger in diameter than said holes in said cover member allowing free movement of said sealing flange device about said fasteners in order to enable positional adjustment of said sealing flange device relative to said cover member.

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5. The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 4, wherein said sealing flange device includes a housing supporting a seal member, said seal member sealingly engages one of said axle shaft members.

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6. The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 5, wherein said mounting holes in said sealing flange device are formed in said housing of said sealing flange device.

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7. The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein said differential assembly module and said cover member are mounted to a flat central plate section of said support beam member.

8. The drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle as defined in claim 7, wherein said cover member is a rear cover secured to a rear mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

5            9. The drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle as defined in claim 7, further including a front cover secured to a front mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

10           10. A method for adjusting a position of an adjustable sealing flange device for a cover member of a vehicular drive axle assembly including a differential assembly module mounted to a support beam member, two opposite axle shaft members oppositely extending from said differential assembly module and said cover member fastened to said support beam member to at least partially cover said differential assembly module; said cover member having two coaxially spaced access openings therein each provided with said adjustable sealing flange device provided to seal an interior cavity within said cover member between one of said  
15           access openings and corresponding one of said axle shaft members; said adjustable sealing flange device being positionally adjustable relative to said cover member; said method comprising the steps of:

- a) securing said differential assembly module to said axle support beam member;
  - 20           b) securing said cover member to said axle support beam member;
  - c) mounting said adjustable sealing flange device to said cover member;
  - d) adjusting the position of said sealing flange device relative to said cover member;
- and

e) securing said sealing flange device to said cover member in the position as set up in the step d).

11. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of adjusting the position of said sealing flange device relative to said cover member includes aligning a second central axis of said sealing flange device to a first central axis of one of said axle shaft members.

12. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of securing said differential assembly module to said axle support beam member includes securing said differential assembly module to a flat central plate section of said support beam member, and wherein the step of securing said cover member to said axle support beam member includes securing said cover member to said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

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13. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sealing flange device includes a housing supporting a seal member, said seal member sealingly engages one of said axle shaft members.

14. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 12, wherein the step of securing said cover member to said flat central plate section of said support beam member includes securing said cover member to a rear mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

15. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 14, further including the step of securing a front cover to a front mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

5           16. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 10, further including the step of inserting an axle shaft into an axle bore in said adjustable sealing flange device for engagement with a side gear of said differential assembly module preceding to the step d).

10           17. The method for adjusting the position of said adjustable sealing flange device as defined in claim 16, wherein said axle shaft is a dummy axle shaft.

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